

DIGGES-SASSER HOUSE
14507 Elm Street
Upper Marlboro
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-786

HABS
MD
17-MARBU,
14-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DIGGES-SASSCER HOUSE

HABS NO. MD-986

Location: 14507 Elm Street, Upper Marlboro, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Lansdale Ghiselin Sasscer, Jr. and Anne Sasscer, his wife (also present occupant)

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: The Digges-Sasscer house is one of the few extant early dwellings constructed in the town of Upper Marlboro. The house has evolved over time into its current form; the original (middle) section dating to the early-19th century with substantial additions--the current main block--in the 1840s and 1880s. It appears today as a mid-century, Georgian, I-house-style residence. The site is also representative of an early in-town residence with terraced lawns and sunken gardens, a stable near the road, a back service road, and other outbuildings including a smoke house and wood house.

The Digges-Sasscer house is also significant for its association with the Digges and Sasscer families; both are old, prominent Prince George's County families, involved in state and local politics.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The original section of the house (the current dining room, breakfast room, and rooms above) were probably built ca. 1826--as indicated by the tax assessments which note improvements to this lot at that time. In the 1840s the house was purchased by a new owner and a parlor and stair hall, with room above, were added, creating the east section of the current main block of the house. In 1881, the west parlor and bedroom above were added.

2. Original and subsequent owners:

ca. 1826 Deed not found, unclear where Benjamin Hodges acquired the lot but it appears with

- improvements in the Tax Assessments, Dist. 3, 1826-38, and is mentioned in deed EWB 1:74.
- ca. 1838 No deed (reference in Tax Assessments Dist. 3, 1838-45 and Deed EWB 1:74)
Benjamin Hodges
To
Edward Scott
- 1843 Deed EBW 1:74 (recorded February 14, 1854)
Edward Scott
To
Daniel Carroll Digges
Benjamin Hodges and Edward Scott to Daniel C. Digges; lot in Upper Marlboro where Digges resides, which Hodges sold to Scott and Scott sold to Digges, 17 July 1843.
- 1871 Deed WAJ 3:253 (Deed recorded 17 November 1881)
Samuel Hance, by Equity #693 (papers missing)
Hance sells real estate of Daniel Carroll Digges, 27 December 1871
To
William A. Jarboe
- 1882 Will WAJjr 1:256
Testator, William A. Jarboe: Executors to sell all real estate, proceeds to be equally divided among children
- 1886 Deed JWB 8:567, 17 November 1886
Charles Clagett and J.K. Roberts, executors of W.A. Jarboe
To
Robert A. Clagett
dwelling house in Upper Marlboro
- 1887 Deed JWB 8:589, 30 May 1887
Robert and Emily Clagett
To
Lucy Sasscer (daughter)
Same house of which W.A. Jarboe died possessed.
- 1921 Will GPH 2:301, 26 July 1921
Testator, Lucy Sasscer
To
Frederick Sasscer, husband
house and lot in Upper Marlboro

DIGGES-SASSCER HOUSE
HABS NO. MD-986 (page 3)

- 1929 Will WTD 2:245, 12 November 1929
Testator, Frederick Sasscer: real estate to be
sold and divided among heirs; sons, F. Harold
and Lansdale G. Sasscer, executors.
- 1931 Deed 360:72, 1 January 1931
F. Harold and Lansdale G. Sasscer, executors
of Frederick Sasscer
To
Lansdale Sasscer (son) and Agnes, his wife
the Home place in Upper Marlboro
- 1952 Deed 1508:342, 26 May 1952
Lansdale and Agnes Sasscer
To
Gladys Duvall
- 1952 Deed 1508:345, 13 June 1952
Gladys Duvall
To
Agnes C. and Lansdale G. Sasscer, Jr. (son)
To Agnes for life, then to Lansdale, 2.6 acre
parcel
- 1985 Deed 6148:693, 1 August 1985
Lansdale G. Sasscer, Jr.
To
Lansdale G. Sasscer, Jr. and Anne Mackall
Sasscer, his wife; Agnes C. Sasscer, life
tenant, having died, 4 March 1984

4. Builder: The original section of the house was probably built for Benjamin B. Hodges (Tax Assessment, Dist. 3, 1826-38). The stairhall and east parlor of the house were probably built for Daniel C. Digges. William A. Jarboe added the west parlor and bedroom above in 1881 (Orphan's Court, Admin. #1188).

5. Original plans and construction: The center section of the south wing (exclusive of rear kitchen section) is believed to be the original part of the house. This is based on the mortise-and-tenon construction, the beaded siding and six-panel doors, which date to the early-19th century. The eastern portion of the main block has Greek Revival detailing as seen in the stairway, dating it to the 1840s. The western portion of the main block, clearly marked by a seam in the exterior siding, was added in 1881, thus completing the main block of the house.

6. Alterations and additions: An addition was made in recent years to the second-story southwest corner where a dressing room and bath were added.

B. Historical Context:

The first settlers in Prince George's County migrated up the Patuxent and Potomac rivers from the early settlements in southern Maryland during the late-17th century. Thus, these rivers formed the corridors for early development, and were the most likely areas in which to establish towns. Early settlement was scattered, however, which led the General Assembly to direct the establishment of towns in 1706-07. Upper Marlboro, (then) on the Patuxent River, was among the six towns established at this time. It eventually grew to become the county seat and among the most populated towns in the county. Town lots were platted and homes such as the Digges-Sasscer house were constructed in this, the most important city in Prince George's County. The Digges-Sasscer House, located on an original town lot, reflects the early planning of the town. It also reflects the social and economic uses of the town lot, which included a formal pedestrian entry, a stable and carriage house and a service road, a kitchen or vegetable garden, formal gardens, and outbuildings such as the wood house and meat house.

The original dwelling house consisted of what is currently the middle section of the house. According to the tax assessment records for district #3, 1826-38, this lot, with improvements, was owned by Benjamin Hodges, who is believed to be the builder of the original house. It was eventually sold, in 1843, to Daniel Carroll Digges. Digges was an attorney, practicing in Upper Marlboro. He served as the county's state's attorney twice and was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates in 1849. Digges added the hall and east parlor of the current main block, probably shortly after his purchase of the property. Digges died in 1860.

An equity proceeding followed Daniel C. Digges's death, and the property was eventually sold by trustee to William A. Jarboe, in 1871. Jarboe served as the Register of Wills for Prince George's County (1854-1871), and as the Clerk of the Court (1879-1882). Jarboe is listed in Hopkins Atlas of 1878 as the County Treasurer and Collector of Taxes, having come from Washington, D.C., in 1840. According to the administration of his estate following his death in 1882, Jarboe completed the

addition of the west parlor of the main block in 1881 (admin. #1188). Jarboe's residence appears on the Hopkins Atlas of 1878--the configuration at that time does not reflect the addition of the west parlor. Original town lots such as this were large in order to accommodate necessary outbuildings, gardens, etc.; most have since been subdivided. This one, however, appears to be one of the few still intact.

Following William Jarboe's death, the property was purchased by Robert Clagett of nearby "Oatlands," as a residence for his daughter, Lucy, and her husband, Frederick Sasscer, Jr. Sasscer, son of Dr. Frederick Sasscer and Rosalie Ghiselin Sasscer of "Kingston" (HABS NO. MD-667), was an attorney practicing in Upper Marlboro, owner and publisher of *The Prince George's Enquirer*, and County Supervisor of Public Schools (Bowie, p.716). Lucy Sasscer is said to have made a few changes to the house including the replacement of the original windows and the addition of Victorian mantels. Mr. Sasscer died in 1929, predeceased by his wife, Lucy. At that time the house passed to Lansdale Ghiselin Sasscer, one of their four children.

Like his father, Lansdale Ghiselin Sasscer was an attorney. He also served as a Maryland State Senator (1922-38), and as a Member of Congress (1939). He married Agnes Coffren in 1919 and together they had three children (Bowie, p. 718). The house is currently the home of their son, Lansdale Ghiselin Sasscer, also an attorney, and his wife, Anne.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Digges-Sasscer house has grown over time, evolving into an I-house of the mid-19th century from a less sophisticated and more functional residence of the early-19th century.

2. Condition of fabric: Although some of the original architectural elements have been changed, such as the windows, mantels, some doors and flooring, etc., the house (and outbuildings and lot) is in excellent, well maintained condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Digges-Sasscer house forms an L-shape. The main block is a two-story, five-bay-by-two-bay-long rectangular structure consisting of center hall with a single room to either side. To the rear is a lower two-story, three-bay-wide (two room) rectangular section, perpendicular to the main block. To the rear of this is a yet lower two-story one-bay-by-one-bay kitchen section. An enclosed porch runs the length of the middle section of the house, at the east side.

2. Foundations: The foundation is of brick, laid in common bond.

3. Walls: The walls are of lapped, wood siding. There is a visible seam where the siding does not align, marking the addition to the main block to the west.

4. Structural system, framing: The older, middle section has mortise-and-tenon joints.

5. Porches: There is a portico at the north front entry of the house. Two box columns with crown molding at the top support the flat-roof entablature of the portico, which has a triglyph-and-metope frieze above which is crown molding with dentiling. To the rear, southwest of the main block is a porch formed by the second-story addition. It is supported by two squared wooden posts, and has a brick floor which continues around to the front of the middle wing along the west elevation. At the east elevation of the middle section, a porch running the length of that section has been enclosed with French doors.

6. Chimneys: The Digges-Sasscer house has four corbelled-top brick chimneys. There is an interior chimney at each gable end of the main block, at the north gable end of the middle section, and at the north gable end of the rear kitchen wing.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The north front entry has a simple entablature with a three-light transom and three-light sidelights with wooden panels below. The four-panel wooden door has deeply inset panels with three courses of molding defining them. There is a doorway to the rear of the main block under the porch, with an unornamented surround, full-

length shutters and a wood-panel door. There is an entry at the west elevation of the middle section, with an unornamented surround and wood-panel door.

b. Windows, shutters: The main block, front and rear, has large six-over-six-light-sash windows with thin muntins. In the east and west side elevations there are narrower, four-over-four-light-sash windows. In the (older) east gable end, to either side of the chimney block is a small two-over-two-light-sash window. In the gable end of the west side are small, rounded-arched six-over-four-light-sash windows. The middle section also has six-over-six-light-sash windows, longer in the second story than in the first. There are six-over-six-light-sash windows in the south end section as well.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: All three sections of the house have gable roofs covered with wooden shingles. The west front elevations of both rear sections have a pent roof over the first story, also covered with wooden shingles. The roof of the southwest second-story addition is flat.

b. Cornice, eaves: The main block has a shallow box cornice with dentiling against a plain frieze in the north front, and molding in the gable end returns. There is an overhang in the gable ends but the eaves are unornamented.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The main block forms an I-house plan. There is a center stair hall with the stairway against the west wall, and a room to either side. The west room (library) has a fireplace to the center of the west wall and an exterior doorway on the south rear wall in the southeast corner. The east room (parlor) is entered through double pocket doors, and there is a fireplace to the center of the east wall. At the rear of the stairhall is a doorway, down two steps, into the older section of the house. The first room (formal dining room) has a fireplace on the north wall with a closet to the east side of it,

and a doorway to the basement stairway next to it on the east wall. There is an exterior doorway at the west wall, southwest corner, and another onto a glass-enclosed porch, across from it on the east wall. At the south wall, southeast corner, is a doorway--past the enclosed stair--into the current breakfast room. There is a fireplace on the south wall, east of which is a doorway into the rear kitchen. In the kitchen, there is an exterior door on the east wall.

b. Second story: In the main block, there is a bedroom over each of the first-story rooms to either side of the stairhall, both with fireplaces. In the northwest corner of the stairhall is a doorway into the boxed-winder stairway to the finished attic rooms. The west bedroom has a dressing room and bathroom addition to the south. The second floor of the south wing is reached from the landing of the main stairway. A hallway runs along the west wall. The first room, formerly one large bedroom, has been divided into a bath and small bedroom. There is a mantel in the bathroom (fireplace closed over). The enclosed stair, again, divides the sections of the house, beyond which is the current study, with a fireplace at the north wall. In the southwest corner is a doorway into the former maid's bedroom--now a bath--over the kitchen (formerly reached by a stair in the kitchen only, since removed).

c. Third floor: A boxed-winder stairway leads from the second floor stairhall into the attic of the main block, which has been finished as guest rooms.

2. Stairways: The open-string, two-flight stairway runs along the west wall of the stairhall to a landing. At the landing, to the south is the doorway into the second story of the rear section, and to the north, the stair turns and rises along the east wall to the second story. The balustrade has a turned newel and turned balusters, two per step. There are brackets in step ends. There is a doorway to the basement under the stair. Also in the main block is a boxed-winder stair to the attic from the second floor stairhall. Between the two rooms of the middle section of the house is an enclosed, single-flight stairway.

3. Flooring: There is hardwood flooring throughout the house. The flooring in the current formal dining room of

the middle section has wide board flooring, recently laid, using the backs of old church pews.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the east parlor is a circular ceiling medallion with an acanthus-leaf design. There is modern built-in shelving on the east wall of the west parlor or library. Throughout the main block is a wide (8") baseboard with a cap molding.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front entry and the doorways into the east and west parlors are surrounded with wide flat boards with a cornice molding. The west parlor has banded one-step door surrounds with a large outer half-round molding. The second floor stair hall has the same molding as the first. The west bedroom has stepped architrave door surrounds with an inner bead. The surrounds in the south wing are all replacements.

b. Windows: The west parlor has banded one-step window surrounds and the west bedroom above has flat, stepped architrave window moldings with an inner bead.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are a number of decorative mantels in the Digges-Sasscer house, most of which, however, are antique but not original to this house. The east bedroom has a Victorian-era gray marble mantel with a round-arched opening surmounted by a cartouche bearing a bunch of grapes. In the south wing, the current dining room has an 18th-century mantel (a replacement from Virginia). The west bedroom has a plain wooden mantel on the south wall that is original to the house. It has a square hearth opening defined by a raised ogee molding, with a plain mantel shelf supported by three fluted brackets with dentils at their base.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Digges-Sasscer house faces north onto Elm Street with a boxwood-lined brick walk leading from the street to the front door. It sits on a large town lot, oriented towards the street which leads into the heart of town and the courthouse. This access is strictly pedestrian, with vehicular access to the rear where there is a service alley and a gravel drive to the back of the house. The house sits roughly to the center of the eastern edge of the 2.06 acre lot,

with most of the outbuildings to the south and east. There is a gravel lot and former stable building to the northwest, accessed from Marlboro Pike.

2. Historical landscape design: Boxwood lines the brick front walk and curves in a semi-circle around the west side of the house. There are also a number of large, old trees scattered throughout the yard, including beech, maple and cedar, which provide ample shade. There is slight terracing in the open area to the west of the house. In the southwest area of the yard are six, rectangular sunken areas where garden plots were once located.

3. Outbuildings: There are four outbuildings on the property. Just east of the house is a large one-bay-by-one-bay, single-story structure used for many years as a children's playhouse. It has lapped wood siding, a gable roof covered with wood shingles and six-over-six-light-sash windows, and rests on a poured concrete foundation. South of the playhouse is the meat house. This is a small, square wood-frame structure with a gable-front roof covered with wood shingles. It sits high on a brick foundation and has a dirt floor. To the south of this is a large, one-story, board-and-batten, early-20th century structure with a gable-front roof covered with wood shingles, used as a wood house. It has entries at the north and east sides. A garage, also board-and-batten, was added to the west end ca. 1986. To the northwest is a one-and-a-half story, board-and-batten stable which appears to date from the late-19th century. It has a gable roof covered with wood shingles and rests on brick piers. There are entries at the east and west gable ends, with the west entry sheltered by a pent roof. A shuttered window centered above the east entry gives access to a loft.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

Bowie, Effie G. Across the Years in Prince George's County (Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie, Inc., 1947).

Hopkins, G.M. Hopkin's Atlas of Prince George's County, Washington, D.C.: 1878.

King, Marina and Susan Pearl (Prince George's County
Historic Preservation Commission), Maryland
Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory
Form for Digges-Sasscer House, prepared December
1987.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Digges-Sasscer House was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert J. Kapsch, Chief, and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, was begun in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian (HPC) made the site selection. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of county history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on-site inspection.